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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 006767

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SUBJECT: JORDAN'S NEW GOVERNMENT TAKES SHAPE, BUT STILL EVOLVING

REF: AMMAN 06728

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) King Abdullah formally accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb on October 22 and entrusted Royal Court Minister Faisal Fayeze with forming a new government. Political insiders, however, express doubt over Fayeze's ability to effectively lead a team of Ministers to implement reforms. No final decisions have been made on the appointment of new Ministers, but Embassy sources indicate that Jordan's new Cabinet may contain a substantial number of Ministers from Abul Ragheb's outgoing government. The still-evolving list of prospective Ministers as of now contains no great surprises and signals no major changes with respect to current economic policies. The possible inclusion of several women and a Minister for Political Development would lend credence to the reported new emphasis on human rights and democracy. End Summary.

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ABUL RAGHEB IS OUT, FAYEZ IS IN  
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2. (U) Information Minister Nabil Sharif told the press late October 21 that Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb would submit his resignation to King Abdullah October 22 upon the King's return from an overseas trip. A follow-up official statement late on October 22 confirmed that Abul Ragheb had tendered his resignation, which was accepted by the King.

3. (U) The Palace officially announced that King Abdullah has chosen Royal Court Minister Faisal Fayeze to succeed Abul Ragheb as Prime Minister and asked him to form a new government. Sharif earlier described Fayeze as having "the respect of and admiration of many Jordanians," and further said that Fayeze was "a well experienced politician who is absolutely capable of carrying out responsibilities and serving his country and his people."

4. (C) Despite Sharif's rather glowing characterization, the choice of Fayeze as Prime Minister has not inspired confidence among Embassy contacts. As reported reftel, Fayeze is seen as lacking the experience, influence and vision necessary to implement an ambitious reform agenda. During a conversation with the DCM on October 21, outgoing Finance Minister Michel Marto said that Abul Ragheb asked him if he would be willing to serve as Minister of Finance under Fayeze, but that he declined. Marto explained that while Fayeze was a very nice person socially, he had no concept of budget or fiscal discipline.

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A NEW CABINET BEGINS TO EMERGE  
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5. (C) King Abdullah is holding a two-day retreat with prospective members of the new Cabinet (see reftel) before he makes any final decisions on government Ministers. Drawing from a variety of sources, we have put together lists of possible Cabinet Ministers. Biographic information for the full Cabinet will be provided septel when the Cabinet is officially announced, possibly as early as Saturday. We caution that these lists are not/not final, but a compilation of insider information and informed speculation.

6. (C) The following Ministerial positions have so far been associated with only one name by the press and/or Embassy contacts. Even though there may be a consensus that these are the present front-runners, the selection process is a work in progress and the King may change his mind at any time before public announcements are made.

Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Trade/Industry: Mohammad Halaiqa (current Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs)

Minister of Planning: Bassem Awadallah (current Minister of Planning)

Minister of Information Technology: Fawaz Zubi (current Minister of Information Technology)

Minister of Finance: Mohammad Abu Hammour (current Minister of Trade & Industry)

Minister of Education & Higher Education: Khalid Tougan (current Minister of Education)

Minister of Islamic Affairs: Ahmad Hilayel (current Minister of Islamic Affairs)

Minister of Energy: Azmi Khreisat (new)

Minister of Water & Agriculture: Hazem Nasser (current Minister of Water)

Minister of Tourism & the Environment: Alia Bouran (new)

Minister of Public Works & Transport: Hosni Abu Gheida (current Minister of Public Works)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Marwan Muasher (current Minister of Foreign Affairs)

Minister of Justice & Prime Ministry Affairs: Salah Al-Bashir (former Minister of Trade & Industry)

Minister of Political Development & Parliamentary Affairs: Mohammad Dawudiyeh (new)

Minister of Municipality Affairs: Amal Farhan (new)

Minister of Health: Said Darwazeh (new)

17. (C) In addition to the above list, the following prospective Cabinet positions are even more uncertain:

Minister of Interior: Samir Habashneh (current Minister of Interior) OR Ali Khalifeh (new)

Minister of Labor: Amjed Majali (new) OR Muzahim Muhaisin (current Minister of Labor)

18. (C) As reported reftel, it is widely expected that the new Cabinet will be reduced in size from 29 to approximately 20 Ministers. Some Ministries will likely be abolished (e.g., Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture) while others will be consolidated (e.g., Water & Agriculture, Education & Higher Education).

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BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING?  
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19. (C) In addition to the two prospective female Ministers listed above (i.e., Alia Bouran and Amal Farhan), one additional Cabinet portfolio -- possibly Social Development -- may be given to a woman. Names up for consideration include: Wijdan Saket, Salwa Masri and Hala Latouf. The Ambassador was told by an informed Cabinet source that another woman, outspoken human rights activist Asma Khader, is a leading candidate for official government spokesperson. While not a Cabinet Minister, this is nevertheless an important position with high visibility.

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MORE FOCUS ON SOCIAL PROGRESS  
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10. (C) Based on the current list of possible Cabinet members, a large number of the new Ministers may be carried over from the outgoing government. This should provide for a large degree of continuity, especially with respect to economic policies. Mohammad Halaiga told the Ambassador on October 22 that he would be given broad control of the overall economic portfolio in the new government, with specific pieces of the economy given to other Ministers. While it has been rumored that Michel Marto will be picked as the new Governor of the Central bank, Marto told the DCM that he has not been offered the position, although he would accept if asked.

11. (C) The inclusion of up to three women in the new Cabinet would serve as a visible symbol of the Palace's oft-stated commitment to promote empowerment of women. Similarly, the addition of a Minister for Political Development, especially if given a serious role, would be a sign that King Abdullah intends to put more effort into broadening the political system and encouraging greater democracy, though to what extent remains unknown.

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POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS  
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12. (C) Not all political insiders appear happy with the prospective new Cabinet. Marto confided to the DCM that in his opinion, the incoming government contained "several ignoramuses and one nit-wit," and that he wished them all

good luck as "they will need it."

113. (C) Halaiga told the Ambassador he was concerned over the inclusion of too many young, inexperienced Ministers and envisioned press headlines that read "The Kids Are Coming!" Halaiga said that he recommended to the King and Fayez that the new Cabinet contain two to three experienced "heavyweights" to counter this reaction, but did not get the impression that they would follow his advice. Halaiga further stated that one or more of the potential Ministers had undefined "problems" with Parliament, and that he had encouraged Fayez to call the leaders of parliamentary blocs (many of who are currently traveling outside of Jordan) before any Ministers were publicly announced to make them feel part of the process and ward off avoidable criticism from MPs.

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COMMENT  
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114. (C) King Abdullah may yet make changes to his current "short list" of Cabinet Ministers based on the outcome of the Aqaba retreat. The King appears to want solid commitments to his priorities by all prospective Ministers. Fayez faces a formidable challenge as Prime Minister given his relative lack of political experience and influence, but his close relationship with the King will go a long way to getting him through the tough road ahead of him.

115. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

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GNEHM